

Remarks of Elvis J. Stahr
The Ohio State University Commencement
St. John's Arena, The Ohio State University
Friday, March 15, 1968

Good morning, honored candidates and your justly proud parents and friends, faculty colleagues and guests. My presence here results from the generous, good-neighbor gesture of your president, Dr. Novice Fawcett-- a trusted and obviously trusting friend. I have known him for a decade, and I have seen many evidences that he enjoys the respect and esteem of the American academic community.

In this, my first appearance before an Ohio State University audience, I am ^{for some reason} reminded of a story related about the operatic soprano Phyllis Curtin, who gained fame singing the role of Salome all over the world. On one occasion, when she had had no opportunity to rehearse with or even to meet the baritone who was to sing the role of John the Baptist, the head of John the Baptist was brought to her on a silver platter with the baritone's card. It read: "Madame, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance." May I say, ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.

Through the years The Ohio State University and Indiana University have been drawn close by interchanges of scholars, both students and faculty, ^{in recent years} and ^{also} of ideas and programs, as members of the CIC. We have enjoyed other interchanges in the form of a friendly rivalry as fellow members of the

Big Ten Conference. Ohio State has even favored Indiana University with an important act of omission--from its football schedule last fall!

It is good to be a guest on the campus of a distinguished sister institution--and it is also good to be in the presence of so many young men and women at a point of major change in their lives--from successful studentship to alumniship that is yet to be evaluated because yet to be lived!

The origins of graduation exercises and the custom of distinguishing the participants through traditional regalia are complex, having arisen from a need to mark the passage of a trainee from apprenticeship into practice, a desire to differentiate the scholars' guild, and a somewhat vested interest in preserving the symbols of learning's ancient place of honor in civilized societies. At one time each University of Paris student, having completed his preparation for teaching, had to undergo a ceremony of being capped with a biretta by his instructor, and of then delivering an inaugural address before taking his seat in his master's chair. It is pleasant to daydream a bit about resurrecting such a custom, or even just to speculate about the significance to the wearer of the costume required of each performer in this morning's "tribal rites."

The caps and gowns you graduating students wear symbolize your imminent initiation into a degree of the fraternity of scholars, and I propose to take you into the confidence of the fraternity to the extent of my limited remarks.

Now, don't be alarmed. You're not on the point of learning that the

treasurer has absconded with the treasury, or that we're about to have a fund drive. But you are entitled, as alumni-elect and therefore as part of an especially privileged portion of our society, to know, more than most, about the concerns of your Alma Mater and of higher education in general, for studenthood, perhaps necessarily, has given most of you no more comprehensive an understanding of educational stewardship than childhood does of parental responsibility.

As holders of bachelor's, master's, doctor's or professional degrees, you will have opportunities, and perhaps even be called upon, to ^{exert} ~~have~~ a direct influence on areas of higher education for which a broad understanding is requisite if your actions are to be informed. You may be asked to vote in a referendum on an issue related to higher education, or for a candidate whose platform and attitudes can help or hinder it. You may be invited to serve on an advisory committee or on a college or university board. You may be elected to the state or federal legislature and have an important say in ^{at least} the determination of the size of the appropriations for the higher learning in the state and nation. You may become a parent desiring to assess the quality of a prospective college or university for your high school graduate. Some of you may become members of the faculty or administration of some college or university. And whatever else, most certainly all of you will be expected to understand your own Alma Mater's goals and needs and give them your support.

It is not incidental to my choice of subject that the concerns and problems with which educators have to deal are interesting in themselves and vitally need public understanding. Who, if not you and fellow

graduates elsewhere, will assist educators in their efforts to develop that public understanding? Throughout our country's history the centrality of education to the successful realization of our democratic experiment has been reenforced by individual men who placed their faith in universal education though aware of its imperfections. From your generation must come the new upholders of learning, the informed protagonists who will honor the challenge of our forebears in your time. Let us look, then, at some of the matters which are deeply concerning educators and now become your concern as well. I hope that they will attract your interest and inquiry sufficiently for you actively to seek a useful appreciation of their significance and the considerations which shape them, for I can only begin to sketch their nature in this brief presentation.

Many of us are convinced that opportunity for education beyond high school must be opened to young people who have the innate talent to do college work but for whom the usual admissions tests prove to be a barrier because of the quality of preparation they have had and the cultural limitations of their early environments. How to accommodate and help these students realistically, without lowering institutional standards for all, how to do this on a broader basis than the pilot programs being tested in some colleges and universities, private and public, in many parts of the country, is a problem of urgent concern. Of course, its long-term full solution requires an attack upon the factors of environment and preparation, but, unless means are found soon to increase appreciably the numbers who are qualified to upgrade that preparation and are committed to such involvement, the vicious circle of frustration will ~~still~~ bind

tightly yet another generation

most of those now caught in its tragic hoop.

As the proportion of college-educated individuals in our society grows and the body of knowledge to be comprehended becomes larger and more difficult, the educational and social gap is only accentuated, intensifying the problem of the drop-out and the inadequately prepared. But the remedy within the capability of college and university is not clear.

Some of the questions thoughtful people have been asking are: How accurate as indicators of probable collegiate success are the present admissions tests? Do these tests rely too heavily on verbal skills Are there ways of telescoping training for entrance into a different level of related to a certain culture or level of society? / Can automated aids society be added to or substituted for tutors in supplying needed extra help? Are individual, public and national interests best served by placing responsibility for remedial education and for vocational and technical training, in colleges and universities or in quite separate educational units?

You can readily see that sound answers to some of these questions would have application beyond the particular problem and yet that none has an easy solution. But they urgently need exploration by lay people as well as academicians, not only in the interest of making opportunity real and realizable and of furthering standards of educational health but also with the hope of continuing education's record of responsiveness to the public need.

A second matter of cardinal concern to all of us is the meaning of academic freedom. Invariably in times of armed conflict involving our nation, external pressures to restrict freedom of expression on the campus mount, for academic hospitality to all ideas and opinions, even to the questioning of national policy, seems to some persons treasonous and to others ill-advised. Yet historically such questioning has often been justified. Moreover, the pendulum of public morale has been known to swing to general disillusionment when high ^{but} ~~and~~ unquestioned purpose such as, say, "A war to end all wars," becomes in time the symbol of a bitter untruth.

Knowledge serves no master other than truth, and the men and women who devote their lives to the discovery, preservation and transmission of knowledge can do so only in an environment of free inquiry. Many of us in our time have seen education under dictatorships become propaganda, the propagation of a dictated point of view which, once given the authority of "truth," rapidly infected and distorted history, the arts, even science--every area of study. We don't have to guess the effect of restricting inquiry; the examples of the Third Reich and of ^{the} Soviet Union make speculation unnecessary.

Today the protection of freedom of inquiry is being subjected to another and different pressure, much of it ^{apparently} ~~coming largely~~ from within the academic community. Using the methods of nonviolent resistance employed by Ghandi, by the feminists in England and America and, more recently, by the Freedom Riders in the South, some students and a few faculty members on

several campuses across the nation have disrupted speakers and blocked access to recruiters ^{and to fellow students} with whose ^{viewpoints or interests} efforts they disagreed. Now, I wish us all to be perfectly clear on the point that the principle of the open campus is, basically, the ^{simple} insistence that all factors should be examined before a conclusion is drawn, ^{and remain open to re-examination.} The open campus does not imply institutional approval ^{of any opinion} nor does it indicate a passive, naive audience ready to be victimized by oratory and sophistry. The true act of education is a selective and corrective process by which facts and concepts which cannot withstand examination and testing may be quickly sifted as dross from the large area requiring longer analysis and trial.

The rationale of the academic protestor who ^{shouts down or otherwise} disrupts the speaker of whom he disapproves, ^{or who} and blocks the paths of others to a recruiter who represents a cause or practice he questions ^{or condemns} is, so far as I understand it, that there is a higher ethic, which requires the interjection of a personal protest ~~against the speaker or recruiter~~ though it violate the principle of free inquiry itself. Implied in the rationale is the priority of personal integrity over any other principle--which may indeed be, ^{and I believe} ^{in making his individual choices--} ^{is, a} defensible priority for an individual person--but which becomes an ^{against academic freedom} indefensible outrage and a return to the law of the jungle when that person seeks by force or intimidation to ^{prevent} ~~prohibit~~ another person from disagreeing or from ~~pursuing his aspirations or~~ exercising his freedoms.

On the surface such a stand may seem merely an illustration of what happens when the other shoe pinches, but an academic man who rejects the very principle which protects his own freedom and that of others to pursue inquiry wherever it may lead has surely allowed emotion to replace reason.

Nor can he dismiss the effect upon students thus encouraged who are apt to follow his lead.

It can be argued that such protests have been effective insofar as they have gained attention and made the ^{campus more} ~~public~~ aware of a dissenting body of opinion, though they appear to have been up to this point ineffective in altering national policy or the attitudes of many people, unless to harden them. In fact, one may question the choice of methods of some campus protestors not only because it affronts the spirit of both peace and free inquiry, but because it is essentially a negative endeavor, placing more importance on registering a ^{dramatic} personal "nay" than on taking positive ^{political} action which has greater likelihood of effecting ^{the sought-for} change.

Certainly, then, a continuing concern on the campus is to keep clear ^{crucial} the difference between dissent and disruption. Questioning of facts, ideas and theories is an integral part of the process by which students young and old learn to think independently and to make rational choices. And it is fundamentally important that they be free to reject and dissent as well as to agree. But dissent that is carried to the point of physical interference with the right of others to inquire, ^{or} to express or ~~to~~ hear a point of view, or to move peaceably and without fear or hindrance about the campus, ~~or the public streets~~, is alien to the environment in which knowledge and truth can be pursued and to the spirit without which academic freedom is dead.

Another interesting, critical, and continuing concern is how to finance higher education, so as to keep it open to all those with the capability and motivation to pursue it, and also to ensure that its quality is worthy of pursuit. In a sense, higher education is suffering from its own success, for sheer numbers of students have created needs for faculty and facilities which have helped push the cost of support high. Of course, the national shortage of faculty in relation to numbers of students and the rising costs of just about everything are integral factors in this financial trend, and these factors are not within the control of an institution. Requests to state legislatures for appropriations large enough to meet the needs of state universities have been producing mounting resistance and in some instances an insistence that the student pay more of the cost of his education. Tuition and fees have had to be raised, and they may have to be raised again and again, to adjust to rising costs, unless the public can be convinced that pricing higher education out of the reach of all but wealthy and well-to-do students is ^{just} not in the public interest. Indeed such an eventuality would represent an almost complete reversion in higher educational opportunity in America to the situation of the seventeenth century.

It is good to remind ourselves of the principle, recognized by our forefathers, that society, not the student alone, benefits from an educated citizenry. This is perfectly clear when we look at the problems of underdeveloped countries, and too we should not forget that graduates themselves more than repay the cost of their education in taxes and public service during their many productive years.

The tendency to think that the costs ought to be shouldered largely by the students has moved so far into the forefront of discussion that not many months ago, as you may be aware, a panel recommended a system of deferred payment whereby each student would pay the full cost of his education and do so through adding a percentage to his income tax each year for life. Along with some pretty obvious objections to this kind of indenturing, I would suggest that the potential encumbrance on the woman graduate might easily make coeducation very nearly a thing of the past. I doubt anything will come of this particular type of proposal, because it seems so very unsound, but the very fact it was thought of illustrates the severity of the financing problems of institutions today.

Universities caught in the financial press--Ohio State and Indiana among them--are, among other things, searching every source of private support to deflect a heavier burden from the student and to keep the quality of their educational offerings from slipping. I urge each of you to support your Alma Mater down through the years in the measure of your means, and, more than that, I ask that you give your own best thought and invention to the problem of how the financial needs of higher education can and should be met.

One further challenge to your sharing of educational concerns is the question of who should "control" the programs, policies and plans of colleges and universities. At one time or another in the history of higher education worldwide, quite a variety of forms of control has been tried. Time after time in the past century the issue of control has surfaced in our state universities in one form or another, perhaps most

often in the form of issues of political control versus control by independent lay boards. In recent years, at least, arguments have been advanced for student control, faculty control, Trustee control, legislative control, State Board control, and State Government control. Too often, the arguments tend to polarize and fail to recognize the legitimate and needed uses of participation by all these constituents, to one degree or another, in one aspect or another of the total institutional undertaking. In fact, the word "control" itself is apt to be extraordinarily unhelpful in arriving at the most sound and dynamic balance of participation, interest and assignment of meaningful roles. While no one would advocate, I think, "control" by a single individual, probably no two groups would agree on which of them, if any, should exercise anything approaching a totality of control. The simple fact is that the university is a phenomenon without obvious parallel. It is quite possible for a student or faculty member to spend a period of years on a campus and never comprehend more than a few aspects of the organization of which he is a part. It is not only possible--it happens. Even more likely, then, is the possibility that a non-university person will not understand the organization.

Yet intelligent control and the protection of the legitimate interests of the public are premised on such knowledge. Since by and large the diverse interests of higher education are best served if the general public shares responsibility for, and therefore some representation in the control of, public education, it behooves you as upcoming members of that public to inform yourselves more than you probably have done and to help educate others about this/^{key}element in our national and international life which is called the university. It's my biased opinion that you won't find the

study dull. You may even be tempted into learning more about not just the two or three great concerns I have mentioned but also others of high importance in the affairs of your new fraternity.

The five infinitives of fraternal loyalty are to ask, to understand, to advise, to support and to act as interpreters. On the network of college-educated men and women throughout the country rests in remarkably large part the determination of where higher education shall go from here. The remaining years of the Twentieth Century are crucial in this regard, believe me. The question underlying many others is, will you and others who have benefited from a college education insist that more young people shall have that opportunity and that it shall be equal to or better than your own? Each of you by the nature of your response will help form the answer to that multiple question. It may well be that the greatest significance of this Commencement is the feeling you take from here about the answer you will make.

Warmest congratulations on your achievement that is being recognized this day--yet, may it be ^{among} the least of your accomplishments!

Thank you.